

Engineering Heritage Australia

*National Engineering Oral History Program
Biographical Notes*

John Keith (Jack) EDWARDS (1924 -)

Harbour Engineer

Birth & Family: Born 29 October 1924, Richmond, Victoria, son of George & Miriam Edwards. Youngest of five children. Father was a baker. Older brother James (1909-12), older sister (1907-2002)

Education: Melbourne High School
Melbourne Technical College (1940-43)

Qualifications: Fellowship Diploma in Civil Engineering 1944.

Memberships: FIEAust.

Awards: 1981 AO for services to industry & education
1996 Director of the Year, Tasmania (Institute of Company directors)
2000 Distinguished Service Medal (Australian Maritime College)
2001 Emeritus Membership of Civil College, IEAust.

Work History: Jack Edwards started work with the Victorian Country Roads Board (1944-48), except for service with RAAF as commissioned Works Officer in 1945.

Subsequently he became Senior Assistant Engineer with the Burnie Marine Board on Tasmania's north west coast (1948-51), then moved to Launceston as Chief Engineer of the Marine Board of Launceston (1951-66), later re-named the Port of Launceston Authority (1966-81).

During his period of tenure between 1951 and 1980, extensive harbour and marine works with the Port of Launceston Authority were undertaken, both at Launceston and Bell Bay, and also making navigation safe in the Tamar River. As a result, trade from the Authority increased from 350,000 tonnes of cargo per annum to 4.25 million tonnes. This expansion required integration of engineering, commercial, financial and industrial facets relating to the operation of a major port, and necessitated cooperation with related industries and shipping interests.

His most extensive achievements derived from his position as General Manager and Chief Engineer with the Launceston Port Authority, and extended to management of the Tamar River estuary via positions as Board member on the Tamar Regional Master Planning Authority (1971-81) and the Launceston Flood Protection Authority (1960-74).

Subsequently, Jack Edwards was Chairman of the Gas Corporation of Tasmania (formerly the Launceston Gas Co.) (1987-96), an Associate Commissioner of the Hydro-Electric Commission of Tasmania (1980-90), Director of flour milling company, Holyman Monds Affleck Pty Ltd (1984-98). Another notable appointment was as Chairman and then Director of

the Tasmanian Development Authority (1984-93). Also Director (1973-86) and Chairman (1982-86) of the Launceston Bank for Savings.

He also became involved in many aspects of public life, particularly education, mainly centred in Northern Tasmania. A major achievement resulted in the formation and establishment of the unique Australian Maritime College in Tasmania, for which he was a Council member and Deputy Chairman (1978-95), becoming Chairman of its consultancy company, AMC Search Ltd (1985-95).

He took an active interest in other educational issues, and was a Council member of the Launceston Technical College (1954-60), the Tasmanian Council of Advanced Education (1976-78), a member of the Committee of Enquiry into the Tasmanian Education in the Next Decade (1977-78). Edwards was also Chairman of the Tertiary Education Commission (1979-83), and Chairman of the Tasmanian Committee (and Member) of the National Executive for the Duke of Edinburgh Sixth Commonwealth Study Conference (1984-86).

After moving into private practice, he established a consultancy with a focus on maritime and harbour works, with clients throughout Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea.

He was a member of the Institution of Engineers, Australia since 1942 and Chairman of the Northern Tasmanian group (1960). In recognition of his wide-ranging involvement in business and community affairs, he was awarded the Order of Australia (AO) for services to industry and education in 1981.

Prepared by Peter MacFie, June 2002 from an oral history interview conducted on 20 June 2002.